

The Sad Mike Chronicles by Iris Violetta

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Mike W.

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-02-16 21:15:27

Updated: 2017-02-16 21:15:27

Packaged: 2019-12-17 15:10:05

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,251

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: They tell Mike it takes time to adjust. He wonders how long they meant. (Originally a drabble series on Tumblr)

The Sad Mike Chronicles

I.

But what if one Friday night fourteen-year-old Mike is home alone when the phone rings. He answers, thinking it's someone for Nancy or his mom or maybe it's Will since his supercom never reaches this far. But after his "Hello?" there's only quiet. And maybe...maybe some breathing. Is that breathing? Is that...? Mike doesn't know if he dares to think it but he can't help it.

El?

Then the line bursts into giggles before disconnecting. Just girls at a sleepover, prank-calling everyone in their class. Mike slowly places the phone back in its holder and swallows hard.

It's never her.

II.

But what if one day thirteen-year-old Mike gets home from school and finds Holly in the blanket fort, playing tea. He freezes for a moment, heart gone cold. That's not the right girl...

But then he finishes descending the stairs and asks if he can join. After all, he's a good big brother.

Holly is thrilled and scoots over to make room for him, thrusting a tiny pink cup into his hand. She pours one for him, one for her, one for her imaginary friend.

He never thinks to ask what her friend's name is.

III.

But what if one night sixteen-year-old Mike is driving home from his job at Radio Shack. He's closed up alone and the winter night has long descended. He wants to get home, get in his warm warm, maybe finish that new book.

The drive is short but windy, all the little residential streets nearly empty. He's humming along to a cassette tape, fingers tapping the edge of the steering wheel when he sees it. A figure. A person. Right in front of him.

He slams on the brakes, head hitting the wheel. He immediately looks back up, about to apologize. But there's no one there. There's no one anywhere.

He could have sworn he saw a girl. A girl in a pink dress.

IV.

But what if one night fifteen-year-old Mike is having a sleepover with the boys at his house. The others have gone up to the kitchen to pile ice cream in bowls. Mike's leaving the bathroom when the basement lights flicker. Once, twice...a pause and a third time.

He's about to call out; it's on the tip of his tongue. But he closes his mouth and stares at the floor. He sees the concerned looks that Dustin and Lucas exchange whenever he brings her up. Sees the misplaced guilt in Will's eyes. Hears his mother's sad sighs. It's better to say nothing at all.

Perhaps he's the only one who still believes. Perhaps he shouldn't anymore.

He climbs the stairs to join them. Perhaps he should have stayed downstairs longer.

V.

But what if when eighteen-year-old Mike starts college, he notices that something is different. He's a few states from home, brand new bedding on an old dorm bed and a bathroom shared by the whole floor. His classes are challenging but interesting, the days new and exciting. But the whole time something feels...off. He can't quite figure it out.

He goes home for the first time at Thanksgiving. After hours of catching up, belly full of his mom's delicious cooking, he retreats to his room to get ready for bed. And that's when it hits him.

The strange creaks in the house. The movements he sometimes sees in the corner of his eye, but can never see straight-on. That feeling on the back of his neck, the hairs prickling. There's none of that at school.

His heart clenches. He hadn't realized how much he missed it.

VI.

But what if December of Mike's 8th grade year, all anyone can talk about is the Snow Ball. Last year was so busy with Will coming back from the dead and his mother worrying over him that it was easy to ignore the stupid dance, to push it away deep and dark inside. But this is 8th grade, the senior year of middle school and everyone is all about the Snow Ball.

A girl from the drama club asks Dustin and Lucas has worked up the courage to invite a girl from math class, who shyly agrees. Will and Jennifer Hayes are going together, quietly as friends. The boys know better than to pressure Mike to invite someone, but they're expecting - well, hoping - that he'll still come.

He wants to. He really does. He listens to their conversations about it and smiles and practices dancing and smiles and even goes with his mom to pick out a suit and smiles and then the smiling hurts and all that he's kept inside bubbles up. The night of the dance he claims he's sick, tells the boys to have fun, ignores his mom and lets it all pour out in the blanket fort until he falls asleep.

He swears he hears someone humming a tune, but he can't tell if he's dreaming.

VII.

But what if one night fourteen-year-old Mike is in his room finishing his homework before bed. He can hear his mom next door in Holly's room, desperately trying to get the girl to sleep. Holly has become difficult lately when it comes to bedtime - one more glass of water Mama, one more story, don't leave me. He can hear their conversation now, not minding the distraction from a particularly boring social studies assignment.

"Holly, I mean it, it's time to sleep now."

"Mama, the closet?"

"I checked. No monsters in the closet, no monsters under the bed. Just you and teddy in here."

"Mama, leave the lights on."

"Honey, you won't be able to fall asleep with all the lights on. How about just the nightlight?"

"But she's a-scared of the dark."

"Who is, sweetie?"

"My friend."

"Oh right, your friend. What's her name again?"

"I dunno, she won't tell me."

"Well, here, I'll leave the door open and then you and your friend will have the light from the hall. Ok?"

"Ok."

"Goodnight sweetie, I love you."

Karen closes the door two-thirds of the way shut and softly pads away.

Mike's whole body feels like ice.

VIII.

But what if one weekend thirteen-year-old Mike is at Will's house with the boys for a sleepover. It's the end of August, the end of summer vacation, the end of lazy days and warm nights.

The boys are sitting in the living room after dinner playing Risk when the dog starts barking wildly outside. His yaps won't stop and finally Joyce calls from the kitchen for Will to go out and stop him.

"Chester! Chester!" Will calls as he runs out. "Shhh boy, what's going on?"

But Chester won't be stopped, whining between barks. Dustin and Lucas join Will and try to pat the animal calm. They're looking down at him when Mike walks out and he sees it. A flicker, a warping of the air next to the shed. He freezes, unable to breathe, until it flickers again.

"GUYS!" He tries to point it out but the air is still, as if it never happened. Chester quiets down to soft whines and the others look at Mike in confusion.

He swears he saw it, swears it was real and the others are kind enough to say he might be right. When he insists on waiting for it to come back they only share a few concerned glances before agreeing.

They sit in a row, keeping their eyes fixed on the edge of the yard. As the sun sets and the moon rises, their chatter slows. Will is the first to go inside, claiming a stomachache and bringing Chester with him. Dustin follows after Lucas shakes him off his shoulder. Lucas is next when his eyes won't stay open anymore. He tries to get Mike to come with him but it's no use.

"Just a little more. I'm just gonna wait a little more."

In the morning Joyce finds three boys snoring on the living room floor and one outside in the grass.

IX.

But what if when Mike is in 9th grade, Valentine's Day becomes a totally different thing. Before it had always been bags of candy in your cubby, giggling girls being annoying and your parents going to dinner. But now he's in high school and he's surprised by how seriously everyone takes it.

The cheerleaders hold a fundraiser each February, selling red roses for fifty cents each. Mike watches as everyone becomes obsessed with these roses, even his own two friends.

"Oh man, I think I'm just gonna send it anonymously," Dustin groans.

"No way! We said we'd both send one and if I'm signing my name you have to sign yours," Lucas replies, grabbing his shoulder and pulling him toward the cheerleaders' table. "Come on!"

"Are you gonna buy one, Mike?" Will asks as they stand at the end of the hall watching their friends fill out their orders. Mike shrugs and keeps his eyes fixed on the table.

"I don't have anyone to send one to." (What he really means is he can't send it to the one he wants.)

Will stares at Mike's profile and softly replies, "Yeah, me neither." (And what he really means is he can't send it to the one he wants.)

But later that day, when he's in the hall alone, Mike strides over to the table and practically throws two quarters at the girl sitting there.

"One please. But I don't want to send it. Can I just have it now?"

He skips math club that afternoon, choosing instead to cross the parking lot to the middle school, where he finds himself in the science room. He grabs a beaker, fills it with water and places the stem inside.

He stays there staring at the rose until his cheeks have dried.

X.

But what if one evening fifteen-year-old Mike is just getting out of the shower, rubbing his towel over his hair, thinking about the math assignment he still has to finish.

He doesn't notice it at first but then he sees it - there, in the corner of the foggy mirror, written in childish letters: MIKE. He blinks a few times and looks closer. It's real. He's not crazy. But who would sneak in and write that?

And how would anyone be able to sneak past the locked door?

He throws his sweats on and bursts into the hall, screaming for Holly. She peeks out of her room, looking concerned, and Mike runs up to kneel before her and clutch her shoulders.

"Your friend, your invisible friend. Where is she? Can you see her?"

Holly, now six, looks back with wide eyes and shakes her head. "No, not anymore."

"You can't see her? Or she's gone?"

"I don't know."

"But she was real, right? She was real?" He's shaking her shoulders now and her tears are on her cheeks and then he's ripped away from her. Karen holds him by the back of the shirt and he's never seen this fire in her eyes before. She slowly lets go and picks up Holly, all while keeping her glare on him. Before closing Holly's door, she quietly but firmly says, "Enough, Michael. That's enough."

Mike slumps further down and breathes hard. She's right. That's enough. The years of watching for flickering lights and listening for whispers and waiting for a ghost...

Enough.

XI.

But what if the worst storm in Hawkins history is on the day after Mike gets home from his freshman year of college. Even though he's been looking forward to the break for weeks now, his parents are already driving him crazy. He's the first of his friends to return and without them around he decides to borrow Castle Byers for an escape.

A few hours later, Mike wakes from a doze to rain leaking through the makeshift roof and he quickly leaves to return to his car. The storm comes on fast and strong, and the trees shudder violently as Mike tries to weave his way through them.

Then the whole woods flash brightly as lightening shoots past Mike to hit an old oak, the cracking of the wood barely heard over the thunder. Mike jumps and his back collides with another tree. Heart racing at the near miss as he watches the large trunk fall to the ground. Heart racing when the trunk starts to glow. Heart racing when something reaches out, a figure slowly climbing from the

pulsing orange.

The sky lights up again and he gets a better view.

A girl, she seems to be around his age. All cheekbones and long tangled hair and drowning in what appears to be a large man's coat. Bare legs. Bare toes. And eyes that lock onto his and seem to beg him not to leave. Eyes that look at him like he's the first rain after the drought. Eyes he has never forgotten.

"Eleven?"